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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: APRIL 28, 2009

Summary: Security forces' claim of "inflicting heavy casualties on militants in clashes in Lower Dir" along with the reports that "TNSM suspended talks with government" dominated headlines in all newspapers on Tuesday. President Zardari's statement that "Pakistan's nuclear capability is in safe hands" received front page coverage. Some major dailies highlighted report that Foreign Minister Qureshi asked U.S. officials "not to panic over Taliban advances in tribal areas." British Prime Minister Brown's Islamabad visit garnered extensive media coverage. Newspapers reported that "Pakistan and Britain vow to jointly fight terrorism."

Most major dailies ran editorials on the overall security situation of the country with special reference to the ongoing military operation in district Lower Dir (NWFP). The centrist national daily "The News" underlined that "an all-out operation against the militants must begin immediately - otherwise the perils faced by Pakistan will only continue to grow ever-more threatening by the day." In contrast, the second largest Urdu daily, "Nawa-i-Waqt," noted that "by showing haste in launching a military operation in Lower Dir, the government has once again taken the situation towards unrest." Commenting on the media reports of the U.S. apprehensions on safety of nuclear arsenals, the populist Urdu daily "Khabrain" advised the U.S. to "focus on trying to improve the situation in Afghanistan rather than expressing concerns on Pakistan's nuclear weapons." End Summary.

News Stories

"Troops Regain Control Of Key Areas; 40 Militants Killed, Claims FC"
"Dawn" (04/28)

"Security forces claimed on Monday that they had inflicted heavy casualties on militants in clashes in Maidan area of Lower Dir district. The clashes have caused a massive displacement. The Frontier Corps said in a statement that more than 40 militants, two 'commanders' among them, had been killed in operation since Sunday. It said troops had regained control of Lal Qila and flushed out militants from Maidan valley, the native region of Sufi Mohammad, chief of the banned TNSM."

"Lower Dir Under Control Of Security Forces: Malik" "Dawn" (04/28)

"Federal Interior Minister Rehman Malik claimed on Monday that Lower Dir was under the 'complete control' of security forces, but admitted that militants were active in Buner."

"TNSM-Govt. Talks On Hold" "The News" (04/28)

"The Tehrik Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammadi on Monday suspended talks with the government unless the newly-launched military operation in Dir Lower is stopped. TNSM spokesman Ameer Izzat Khan accused the government of violating the peace deal, holding it responsible for any adverse consequence."

"N-Weapons In Safe Hands: Zardari" "Dawn" (04/28)

"President Asif Ali Zardari said on Monday that security forces could have eliminated militants in tribal areas if they possessed the drone technology. 'The government possesses the will to fight militants, but there are areas where capability needs to be strengthened. The international community can play a significant role in this regard,' the president said while talking to foreign journalists. He ruled out the possibility of nuclear weapons falling into wrong hands and said they were in safe hands."

"No Need To Panic, U.S. told; Pak, Afghan And Iranian FMs Agree To Expand Cooperation" "The News" (04/28)

"The first meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran was held in Kabul on Monday where, according to a joint statement, there was recognition that the three countries and the region face common and serious challenges and, in that regard, emphasized the need to expand trilateral cooperation in various fields.... Talking to The Associated Press on the sidelines of meetings with his Afghan and Iranian counterparts, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi asked U.S. officials on Monday not to panic over Taliban advances in tribal areas, saying, his country would not surrender or capitulate to militants."

"Pakistan, U.K. At One Against Terrorism: Brown" "The News" (04/28)

"Pakistan and Britain have expressed their firm resolve to jointly fight terrorism and militancy to bring peace to the region as well to the world at large. 'Today we have agreed a stronger and vital relationship between the two countries to combat terrorism and militancy. The two nations are victims of terrorism and both will fight the menace jointly,' Brown said while addressing a joint press conference with Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani at the Prime Minister's House in Islamabad on Monday."

"People Run For Their Lives As Fighting Rages In Dir" "The News" (04/28)

"The residents started leaving their homes for safer places. The residents leaving the area said the operation had caused great losses to life and property. The internally displaced persons (IDPs) said they saw bodies lying in fields and pathways which could not be removed due to curfew in the area."

"Washington Urged Against Dictating Terms To Islamabad" "The News" (04/28)

"The U.S. should persuade India to pull back its troops from Kashmir, so that Pakistan could focus more effectively on the fight against violent extremism, a key Republican senator said, as U.S. lawmakers urged Washington against dictating terms to Islamabad. Appearing on the Fox News channel, Senator Kit Bond, the top Republican on the Intelligence Committee, and Democratic Senator Carl Levin, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, favored the U.S. economic and security assistance for Pakistan, considered by the Obama administration as critical to its anti-terrorism success in Afghanistan."

"Pakistan To Get Most Of \$1.5 Billion War Expenses Before June" "The News" (04/28)

"Pakistan and the United States have put in place a new system, under which Washington will ensure speedy reimbursement of expenditures being incurred on war against terrorism, and the services and facilities being rendered by Pakistan Armed Forces on this vital front, a senior official at the Ministry of Finance told 'The News.' Under the new system, Pakistan is to get, before the month of June in which the federal budget to be announced, most of the total amount of \$1.5 billion which the U.S. owes to Pakistan."

"NWFP govt. Tells Taliban To Leave Buner Or Face Action" "Daily Times" (04/28)

"NWFP Information Minister Mian Iftikhar on Monday warned the Taliban of military action if they did not leave Buner district. 'Leave Buner or face action,' the Minister said while addressing a news conference in Timergara."

"Full-Scale Military Operation Likely In Buner" "The News" (04/28)

"The Army is gearing up for launching a full-scale military operation in the strategically located Buner district to defeat the militants and secure control of the area to block their possible advances to other areas, particularly Hazara, official sources told 'The News' on Monday."

"Taliban Capture Exchange, Loot NGO; Lawyers Warned Of Action As Tension Escalates In Swat" "The News" (04/28)

"Tension in Swat Valley is fast escalating as Taliban continued armed patrolling, threatened a group of lawyers and recalcitrant militants of actions, captured telephone exchange in Sataal and looted two NGO offices in Saidu Sharif."

"Troops Deployed Along Karakoram Highway" "Dawn" (04/28)

"The government on Monday deployed army troops on the Karakoram Highway in Shangla, Battagram and Kohistan following attacks on some NGO offices in Saidu sharif."

"56% In FATA See Afghan Taliban As 'Heroes': Survey" "Daily Times" (04/28)

"Exactly 56 percent respondents described Afghanistan's Taliban as 'Islamic heroes fighting western occupation' in a survey conducted by Community Appraisal and Motivation Program (CAMP) with the help of the British High Commission in Islamabad."

"Tableeghi Jamaat Leaders Denounce Gunpoint Shariah" "Dawn" (04/28)

"In an unprecedented move, top leaders of the Tableeghi Jamaat (Largest Muslim missionary group that preaches Islam, and believes in non-violence) have denounced enforcement of Sharia at gunpoint, religious extremism, militancy and terrorism. Leaders of the Jamaat, who scrupulously avoid speaking on controversial issues, also called for promoting inter-faith harmony, tolerance, human rights, social justice and peace."

"Taliban Kill 'U.S. Spy'" "The News" (04/28)

"The Taliban militants killed a man in the tribal area accusing him of spying for the U.S. forces stationed in Afghanistan. A note found with the body said he was 'an important U.S. spy,' a local administration official said on Monday requesting anonymity."

"NATO Warships Begin Exercise With Pakistan Navy" "Dawn" (04/28)

"NATO warships sailed out on Monday to take part in an exercise with Pakistan Navy and its air units against piracy, terrorism and human trafficking in the Arabian Sea.... The exercise will provide an opportunity to reassess the timely force availability by developing mission-tailored units, both fleet and marines, augmented with specialized modular units and command-and-control elements, capable of flexibly switching roles and tasks, at and from the sea."

Editorials/Op-eds

"End Of The Short 'Peace'?", an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/28)

"We cannot hope to get away by killing militants in one place and striking accords with them in another. There needs to be a more holistic plan in place to combat the militant threat. A failure to do so will be disastrous, with the U.S. already issuing warnings that it will step in if Pakistan fails.... The statement from the Taliban that they have no plan to lay down arms till all Americans

leave Pakistan is just one indication of the growing tensions between the government and the TNSM. It is also becoming clear that the aged Sufi Muhammad Khan cannot deliver much, if anything at all, of what he has promised. An all-out operation against the militants must begin immediately - otherwise the perils faced by Pakistan will only continue to grow ever-more threatening by the day."

"Haste In Military Operation," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (04/28)

"By showing haste in launching a military operation in Lower Dir, the government has once again taken the situation towards unrest. Perhaps this operation is the result of the U.S. threats through Hillary Clinton and other U.S. officials that the U.S. would bomb Taliban hideouts itself if the government does not stop the Taliban from advancing towards Islamabad.... What is the difference between the present government and Musharraf's dictatorship if the present rulers are also bowing to U.S. pressure and spilling Pakistanis blood in military operations?"

"U.S. Threat Of Interference In Swat Is Meaningful," an editorial in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000) (04/28)

"U.S. authorities should have faith that Pakistan's nuclear assets are safe.... The Taliban had occupied Buner a few days ago, yet just one operation by the armed forces was enough to drive them away. The U.S. should focus on trying to improve the situation in Afghanistan rather than expressing concerns on Pakistan's nuclear weapons."

"Pakistan's Nuclear Assets, Hillary Clinton's Statement And The Government," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (04/28)

"Even U.S. military officials have praised the command and control system established by Pakistan after the nuclear tests.... Despite this, from time to time, U.S. authorities try to pressurize Pakistan and reveal their ill intent about Pakistan's nuclear program.... The government must lodge a strong protest against Hillary Clinton's statement as it is akin to destabilizing Pakistan and encouraging Pakistan's enemies."

"Doing More," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (04/28)

"If Secretary Clinton is sincere, she should listen to President Zardari, who will have the opportunity during his forthcoming U.S. visit, to tell her that the U.S. policies in the region do not enable the achievement of U.S. goals, let alone Pakistani. Secretary Clinton has revealed the abiding fear the U.S. has of the Taliban, or their Al-Qaeda allies, getting a nuclear weapon, and also the fear that this will be a Pakistani weapon.... It should be noted that the U.S. concern over the safety of Pakistani nuclear weapons has its origins in baseless Indian propaganda about them.... If Pakistan is to resist terror, the U.S. must provide it the means with which to do so, such as sophisticated weapons."

"Results Of Growing American Pressure," an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (04/28)

"If we continue to abide by the U.S. policies blindly, the day is not far when Pakistan will turn into another Afghanistan or Iraq. Therefore, it is essential to see things not with an American perspective, but we should formulate a unified national policy to drive the country out of the present quandary. Any further delay will take us to a point of no-return."

"U.S. And Pakistan Role In The Afghan War," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 100,000) (04/28)

"Now that the global situation has taken a new turn and the war on terror is affecting the entire world not just the U.S., it is imperative that the new U.S. administration understand the ground realities also. The U.S., and not Pakistan, is responsible for the spread of terrorism around the world; hence eliminating terrorism is

also America's responsibility. Therefore, instead of mounting pressure on Pakistan, the Obama administration should try to help Pakistan and try to resolve its economic problems."

"No More 'Do More,' Please," an editorial in the country's premier business newspaper, "Business Recorder" (cir. 25,000) (04/28)

"President Zardari would be agreeing to 'do more' at the cost of his popularity - already under erosion thanks to the American media. President Zardari wouldn't be able to concede anything beyond what Pakistan has already committed to America's anti-terrorism war in this region. He is incapacitated by the harsh reality that Pakistan's losses, both in terms of human sufferings and economic hardships, far exceed those of its partners.' As he proceeds to hear 'do more' mantra Pakistan's partnership has come under sharper focus, as there is the public perception that its so-called allies are busy conspiring to dispossess it of its nuclear capability."

"Swat Agreement - An American Target," an editorial in the Karachi-based right-wing pro-Jamaat-e-Islami Urdu daily "Jasarat" (cir. 3,000) (04/28)

"The U.S. has opposed the Swat Peace Deal, and the Pakistan government cannot annoy Americans, thus the future of this accord was uncertain right from the day one. U.S. continues to create hype about Taliban and their capabilities and intentions. The idea behind Swat Peace Deal was to separate common people from Taliban, but Americans perhaps don't want to do so. Consequently, a bloody conflict is to be unleashed soon, and more Pakistanis will be butchered by one another that will be our loss in the end."

"What Is America Looking For?," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-right sensationalist Urdu daily "Ummat" (cir. 33,000) (04/28)

"It seems that the U.S. is giving an impression that Taliban can takeover Islamabad and possibly can control Pakistan's nuclear weapons. In that case, it would become inevitable for the U.S. to come to rescue the nuclear arsenals to save the world from any possible nuclear threat. Before reaching to this point, the U.S. administration and the media are building momentum by raising fear and uncertainty in Pakistan and about the future of Pakistan."

"Military Operation In Lower Dir," an editorial in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (04/28)

"It is not easy to face [U.S.] pressure.... However, the agreement with Sufi Muhammad to deal with the Taliban issue in Swat and Malakand needs to be implemented in letter and spirit. It is encouraging to note that the government has said the operation in Lower Dir does not affect the peace deal in Swat. Moreover, until the Qazi Courts are established, undue pressure should not be exerted for the surrender of weapons. On the other hand, the Taliban must also try to understand the gravity of the situation. According to the promise made earlier, they must hand over their arms to the government and adopt the peaceful strategy of preaching to set up an Islamic society."

"Peace Deal, U.S. Demands And The Operation," an editorial in the Lahore-based Urdu daily "Waqt" (cir. 5000) (04/28)

"The operation in Lower Dir is taking the situation in a direction where chances of peace are again being minimized.... This change in the national scenario demands that the government take a fresh look at Pak-U.S. relations. The government should take steps that do not compromise its autonomy and independence."

"Military Operation: Devise Clear Policy After Consultations," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (04/28)

"The government must take all the political parties, coalition partners and tribal elders into confidence on the military operation against the militants, and chalk out a comprehensive and concrete strategy to deal with this situation. The irresolution and ambiguous approach have exacerbated the state of affairs, undermine the national security, integrity and sovereignty, and provided other

countries an opportunity to meddle into our internal affairs."

"Dir Operation," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (04/28)

"Pakistan is ceding territory by the day and anyone who thinks that the Taliban advance can somehow be confined to 'that' part of the country is sadly mistaken.... Every single 'deal,' and there have been many of them, has only allowed the Taliban to regroup and prepare for fresh assaults against the federation. It has to be acknowledged once and for all that the Taliban are the single biggest enemy the country has ever faced since 1947.... It can only be hoped that the operation in Dir is not a one-off move aimed at countering western criticism of Pakistani inaction. To be successful, it has to be part of a wider strategy of taking on the Taliban with all the force the military commands.... A clear message needs to be sent that the government, the army and the people of Pakistan are all on the same page."

"Peace In Malakand," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (04/28)

"There is a need on the part of the TNSM and TTP to avoid the path that leads to confrontation and bloodshed. A free society allows all interest groups and political parties to express their views in order to gather support for them.... What is not allowed, however, is recourse to the use of force for the implementation of one's program. Anyone attempting to do that is liable to be confronted by the collective will of the people of Pakistan."

"First, We Must Have The Will To Fight The Taliban," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (04/28)

"If the operation in Dir is not the beginning of a larger strategy of dealing with the threat of the Taliban, it is bound to fail, adding to the suffering of the people.... When the Taliban agree to a ceasefire anywhere, they want to gain time to put in motion the logistics of reinforcement. It is not a force that you can defeat in one area and hope that they will not return.... The army must decide to mobilize at a scale commensurate with the force of the enemy being engaged, with the capacity to look after people who will be displaced by conflict.... The kind of action required should have needed consultations at the international level in order to have a clear understanding about how risky the mobilization against the Taliban will be in relation to the army's defence responsibilities with regard to India."

"Taliban Terror," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/28)

"It is time that, as citizens, we fought back for our rights; for our space and for our right to live without constant fear. So far this struggle has not been taken up in earnest. It is time to push back the tide and rescue our nation from a fate that will jeopardize the future of all its citizens."

"Seeds Of Rebellion," an op-ed by Anjum Niaz in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/28)

"General Kayani spoke and the Taliban left with their tails between their legs in Buner, so we're told. Does this mean that unless the Army Chief brandishes his stick in the air, the militants don't listen to any lesser human? While we wish our soldiers Godspeed, we need to be alert to the criticism creeping out from the West regarding Pakistan's weakness to fight the extremists. Our Army Chief has rightly denounced the hand-wringing while the GHQ has castigated America and Britain for casting aspersions on the ISI. But such sentiment is ephemeral, it quickly vanishes. If history has taught us any lesson then we must watch what's happening around us with eyes wide open."

"Faltering U.S. Strategy," an op-ed by Masood Sharif Khan Khattak in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/28)

"It is in the long-term interest of the U.S. itself to seek peace rather than continue to destabilize the region through a heavy

military presence in a combat role. It is also not going to be long before the cash starved U.S. public starts calling for an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; a call no U.S. administration will be able to ignore. This region will then be lost to the U.S. for many decades to come. Contrarily, indefinite U.S. military occupation of Afghanistan will create a devastating turmoil in the region. Resultantly, the U.S. will lose its present foothold in Afghanistan. Without a doubt, it is now time for the U.S. to spread a new canvas and paint afresh a picture of peace which has goodwill, development, fraternity, tranquility and inter-faith harmony painted clearly if it wants its influence and diplomatic presence in this region to remain."

"Battle For Pakistan's Soul," an op-ed by Javid Husain in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (04/28)

"The turmoil in FATA is directly linked to the continued fighting and instability in Afghanistan and the presence of foreign forces in that country.... The measure of the success of our diplomacy vis-à-vis the Americans will be our ability to convince them that failing such a new political dispensation, the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan will remain a pipe dream and their pressure on us to do more will merely destabilize Pakistan with dangerous consequences for them and the whole region. What the Americans need is to do more politically in Afghanistan instead of relying on the brute use of force to achieve their goals." Feierstein